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SOMETHING ABOUT THE HISTORY OF POTTERY

A MORNING EXERCISE¹

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FIRST EXERCISE

Reading of Selections from Longfellow's "Keramos," with a Few Words of Explanation of the Poem.—H. P.

A long time ago, before people invented pottery, they used gourds for dippers and cocoanut shells for cups, and if they could not find cocoanut shells or gourds, they used wooden bowls. In countries where bamboo grows they carried water in bamboo flasks. They cut off one joint of bamboo and corked it up and put water in it. And they carried water in skin bags, and they made stone mortars to grind their corn in. And they made baskets, too. After a while they began to make pottery, and we think one way it was invented was this: Once a person went down to a pond to get some water, and it was all muddy at the edge of the water. He stepped in the sticky mud (which was really clay) and left footprints. And when he came the next day the place was dry. And he came again after a rain, and then he saw that the footprints were full of water, and he dug one out and brought it home and used it for a bowl. I made this footprint to show you how his looked. Then they thought they would make bowls with their hands. They took a solid piece of

¹ While the children of the Francis W. Parker School are working at their modeling, stories are sometimes told them of famous potters, or of the history of pottery; and they are encouraged to think out their own theories of how pottery came to be invented, and then are given opportunity to compare these theories with those of authorities on the subject. Occasionally the older children are given references to look up and report upon to the class. Out of this work grew two consecutive morning exercises based upon the material thus accumulated. The following stories are retold, as nearly as possible in the children's own words, not omitting some misstatements which were made in the telling. The illustrative drawings are taken from the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

clay and dug it out in the middle, this way. That is the way we make some of our inkwells.

S. O., 4th Grade

A long time ago, people used to have houses called *wattle and daub*. They were made of branches and twigs all woven together, with clay plastered over them. And sometimes these houses would burn, and people saw that the clay would not burn like the branches, but only got harder, so they thought it would be a good plan to make houses of the clay, and then they made bricks for their houses. And they learned to make their dishes hard by burning, too.

G. H., 4th Grade

A long time ago, long before the white people were here, the Indians did not have pottery, but used baskets (Fig. 1, *a*) to

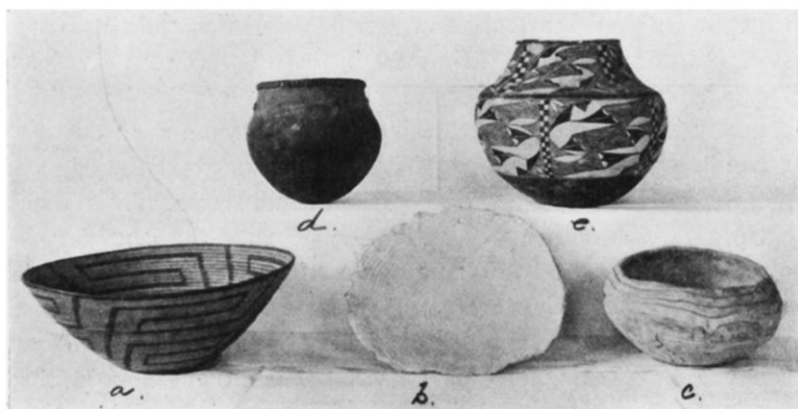


FIG. 1

cook in. And to keep their baskets from burning up they put clay on the outside. They liked that. We think that some time a woman was cooking in a basket smeared with clay, and she went off and left it over the fire and it burned up. And when she came back she found only the clay, which was still in the shape of the basket but burned hard, like this (Fig. 1, *b*). That

gave her an idea, and she decided to make other bowls like that, and she told her friends about it. For a while they made bowls by sticking clay over the outside of the basket, but then they thought that if they put the clay on the inside they could build the bowl up higher by using coils, just as they used coils in making their baskets. Then it looked like this (Fig. 1, *c*). After a while they learned to scrape the bowls smooth, like this (Fig. 1, *d*) and at last to paint them (Fig. 1, *e*).

G. H., 3rd Grade

The way that potter's wheels were first thought of was this: The ancient people used to put their vases on round stones and

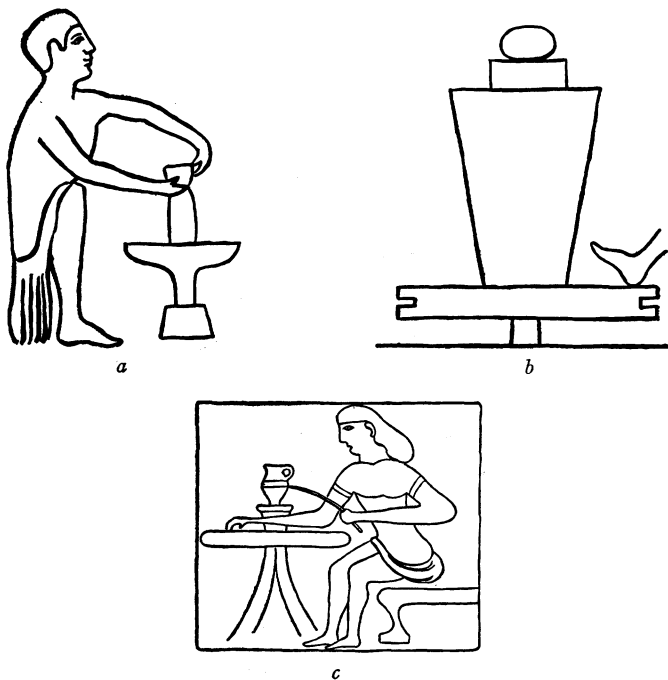


FIG. 2

turn them round to shape them, and after a while they thought it would be better to keep the stand turning and shape the pots by hand. This is a drawing (Fig. 2, *a*) made from a wall painting on an Egyptian building erected about 4000 B. C. This

drawing (Fig. 2, *b*) shows an Egyptian wheel, date about 2000 B. C., run by foot power like our kick-wheel downstairs. This is another (Fig. 2, *c*), a Greek one, showing the way they marked the pots. They put them on the wheel and held a stick up against the pot and it would leave lines. Maybe this way of

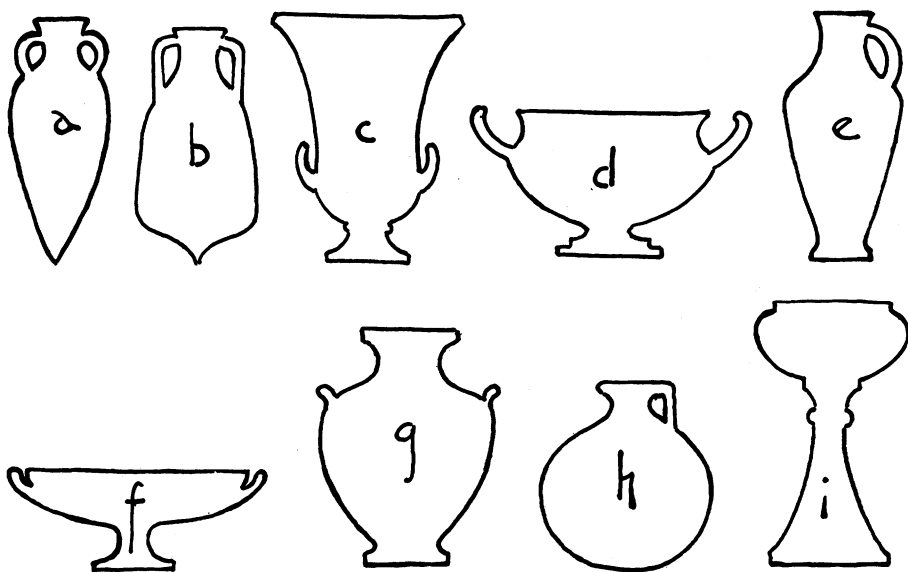


FIG. 3

marking was the result of some potter going off and leaving his work on his wheel, and some mischievous boy coming along and turning the wheel and sticking a stick up against it while it moved. In the Middle Ages, they had a potter's wheel that was driven by turning a crank, and after a while they fastened a treddle to the wheel and ran it with that. After that they used steam, and now they use electricity.

P. H. G., *8th Grade*

I want to tell you something about Greek vases. The Greeks used their vases in the beginning to hold grain and wine. Their first vases (called Amphorae) were on this order (Fig. 3, *a*), and were stretched on ropes in the room. This Amphora has

two handles. This is a second kind (Fig. 3, *b*). Sometimes the points were long enough to stick into the ground. This (Fig. 3, *c*) is a Krater, which is perhaps the largest of all the Greek vases. It was used for mixing wine with the water. We get our word *crater* from this word. This (Fig. 3, *d*) is a drinking cup, called Kantharos. From the large Krater they poured the wine into a pitcher (Fig. 3, *e*) and then into the drinking cups, which were very beautiful, the most beautiful being a Kylix (Fig. 3, *f*) which was used for the wine offered to the gods. This large jar (Fig. 3, *g*), the Hydria, was used for storing grain. This round jug, called Aryballus (Fig. 3, *h*) was for carrying water for the bath, and the Lebes (Fig. 3, *i*) was a jardinière.

The decorations on Greek pottery are divided into four great classes. This (Fig. 4, *a*) shows the earliest stage—just straight

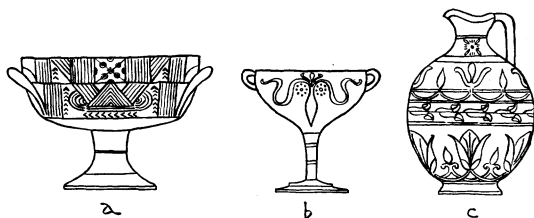


FIG. 4

lines and circles and triangles, and you can see how they correspond with our Indian designs (Fig. 1, *e*). The second (Fig. 4, *b*) shows how they used fishes and seaweed, and small plants and things of that nature, for their designs. The third (Fig. 4, *c*) is the largest class of all, the conventional design. The fourth class is perhaps the most important. That is the class decorated by figures of people. It is the most important because it is a great source of history. We learn a great deal of Grecian history from their vases. The Greeks decorated their vases with figures of heroes and kings. We can tell their dress from these vases, their customs and habits, and something about their religion and their wars and battles. Sometimes Greek artists would put a whole battle on a vase.

T. M., 11th Grade

Perhaps you will remember reading in the *Recorder* that the fourth-grade children are furnishing a room in a Greek house. Some of the children are making pottery for it. Some of them have made Amphorae, and some vases, and some others have made lamps (Fig. 5). Besides these toy ones, three of the children are making Greek vases for the fourth-grade room. The Greek clay is red when it is baked, and our clay is white. We haven't any red clay, so we have painted the vases and pottery to make them look like the Greek. We had to find out how



FIG. 5

to make these vases so we studied pictures and went to the Art Institute and studied the lamps and vases there, and in that way found out how to make them. When we go out on our field trip to Glencoe, we are going to bring home some of the common clay. Some people say that common clay when it is baked turns red, and we are going to try and see if it does.

SECOND EXERCISE

Reading of Selections from Browning's "Rabbi Ben Ezra," and from Omar Khayyam.—Mrs. B.

The pottery about which we talked to you yesterday was earthenware. We are going to talk to you today about porcelain. Porcelain is made of very fine white clay called kaolin, or else of a compound made to imitate kaolin. When broken, it shows

white and glassy all the way through; earthenware does not. Porcelain requires a great deal more heat to fire it than earthenware does; for that reason earthenware was invented before porcelain. The first porcelain we know about was made in China, probably about the time of Christ. We know that the American Indians did not make any. They did not use the potter's wheel, and even the Greeks never made porcelain, although they worked with the potter's wheel and made wonderfully beautiful earthenware. Porcelain did not come into Europe at all until about the fourteenth century. Then various European countries began to make it. Can you think why it started just then? You of the older classes know that after the Crusades the people of Europe began to trade with the Orient a great deal more than before. They had found out what riches there were there, and travelers worked farther and farther to the East, looking for trade, until finally, in the fourteenth century, Marco Polo and his father went into China; and among the things that Marco Polo brought back to his people from China were pieces of porcelain, which he introduced into Europe by the name of chinaware; that is why we call it *china*. The people of Italy and Spain were the first Europeans to make porcelain. Of course you know that Marco Polo was an Italian. A great many of the travelers were Italian or Spanish, and when they made their ware they copied the Chinese porcelain, not only in material but also in coloring and decoration. We are going to tell you this morning of some of the ware they produced in trying to make these copies, and of one kind in particular—Majolica. This was made on an island by the name of Majorca, a Spanish island in the Mediterranean Sea. H. P.

Palissy, a Frenchman, was the first potter to invent a porcelain of artificial kaolin. He was a rather poor man, whose profession was painting stained glass windows for churches. He happened to see a piece of Majolica ware in a Paris museum, and from that time on he had no peace of mind until he could try to make a ware like it. So he went to a pottery near by and got some pieces of their jars, which he ground up and tried to use,

but this did not work at all well because the jars were poorly made, and there were pebbles in the clay, and the only kiln he had to use was that of the glass foundry, which was too hot. But he tried other clays and kept on working, spending all his money in trying to find out what materials to use, though his wife, who had no sympathy with his aim, made his life miserable with her scolding and complaints. Finally he went to one of the larger potteries to look and see how the ware was made, but they would not let him in. So he came back, but on his trip he saw the Majolica ware again, and it was so wonderful that it was like an intoxication to him, and he *had* to work at it. So he built a kiln, but that did not work very well, and he had to build another. At last, after more and more successful experiments, a day came when he felt sure that he was going to succeed. He had a fire in his kiln, but his fuel gave out, so he went into the house and broke up the chairs and tables to burn. His wife and neighbors tried in vain to stop him. Then his fire started to go out again, and he went into the house and tore up the floor. That finished the firing, and when he opened the kiln, he had the white opaque glaze for which he had worked so long. After that he worked as a potter, and he chose some very queer decorations; he used to take not only flowers and fruits, but insects and frogs and lizards as ornamentations on his dishes. Palissy was a Huguenot, a sect at that time greatly hated by the Royalists, but the king liked his ware so well that he was taken to court to work there. Later, however, he was thrown into prison because he was a Huguenot, and died there.

C. G., 9th Grade

The Chinese ware was clearer and better than the European ware; it was whiter and it lasted longer, so everybody in Europe was trying to find real kaolin to use in pottery instead of the artificial mixture. There was a German physician and chemist, Dr. Boettger, who was interested in pottery making. One morning his servant came in with the doctor's wig freshly powdered and feeling strangely heavy. Dr. Boettger always investigated everything, so he asked about the powder, which looked and felt,

he thought, like the Chinese kaolin. The servant told him he had gotten the powder from a neighboring blacksmith, who was selling it. The smith said he had been out riding and had gotten some white clay in his horse's hoof. When he scraped it out, it powdered so finely that he thought it would make good wig powder, so he had gotten some to sell. Dr. Boettger investigated it and found that the clay was kaolin. Then he began making pottery, and became very much interested in it. The king of Saxony saw his ware and liked it, and sent Dr. Boettger and his assistants to a castle near Dresden, where they could work without having the secret found out. This was the beginning of the famous Meissen pottery, which is one of the best known porcelain wares today.

S. R. S., *9th Grade*

Besides the highly colored Chinese wares, such as Canton, which led to the bright-colored European pottery, like Majolica, there is a great deal of old Chinese porcelain that is blue and white—for example, the Nankin ware. Some of the Europeans liked the blue and white better than the brighter-colored china, so they tried to imitate it. At first they copied the Chinese designs as closely as they could, but later they began to make their own patterns. The people of Delft, in Holland, became famous for their blue and white porcelain. Their older pieces show the influence of the Chinese patterns, but their later work is decorated with pictures of objects they saw about them—boats, windmills, etc. Some of the Meissen ware, notably the well-known onion pattern, is also blue and white. There is a blue and white English china that is a very close copy of the Nankin ware. That is the famous “Willow pattern,” a real Chinese pattern, with a Chinese legend attached, although the arrangement for the dishes was designed by the famous English artist, Turner. Alice is going to tell you the legend.

H. P.

Once upon a time there was a merchant, and this merchant lived in a very fine house, and he had a very beautiful daughter.

And there was a man who liked her very much. He was a poor man and lived in a small house across the river from the merchant (you can see both houses on the plate). One day this merchant went out, and the poor man came and took the merchant's daughter, and led her under the willow trees and across the bridge to his house. One of her servants went with her. When the merchant came home, he was very angry at his daughter and the young man, and he got into his boat and started across the river to catch them. They were very much afraid he was going to catch them, so they prayed to the Spirit of the Air to help them, and he turned them into birds, and they flew away and were happy ever after.

A. K., 3rd Grade

Josiah Wedgewood was born in England in 1730. He came from a family of potters and naturally became one. He was taken from school when quite young, and went into partnership with his uncle. He was employed as thrower—that is, he made shapes for jars on the potter's wheel. After a few years he went into partnership with another potter, and they built a place known as the Bell Works. The reason they called it that is because they had a bell on the top that called all the people to work. Wedgewood took great interest in his laborers. He built them comfortable houses and made their working conditions as good as possible. In this building, the Bell Works, he made what is known as *queensware*. The reason he called it this was because the first piece of it he made, he gave to the queen, and she ordered so much of it that he got rich. About this time, the Duchess of Portland had an auction of some of her possessions. Among them was a wonderful vase which had been brought from Italy, and Wedgewood wanted it to copy. So he tried to bid it in at the auction, but a young man, a nephew of the Duchess, wanted it too, to keep it in the family, so he bid against Wedgewood. At last when the bidding had gone up very high, the young man went to Wedgewood and asked him what he wanted it for. Wedgewood told him he was a potter, and he wanted to try to make some ware like it. They finally

agreed that the young man should buy it, but Wedgewood was to borrow it until he could get his copy made. The copies he made are known as jasper ware, and the modern jasper ware is what we call Wedgewood. The reason why Wedgewood went into the scientific part of pottery-making is because he lost his leg; he had to have it cut off, and could not work at the wheel any more.

M. L., 9th Grade

Reading from Kipling's "Letters from the East," of the description of his visit to a Japanese pottery.—H. P.